



May 23, 2005

Downtown Master Plan Action Team  
Attn: Mr. Kent Morgan  
Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Department  
555 South 10th Street  
Lincoln, Nebraska 68508

Re: Downtown Major Events Site

Dear Members of the Downtown Master Plan Action Team

Updowntowners, Inc. wishes to thank the City of Lincoln and the Downtown Master Plan Action Team for allowing us to participate in the exciting process of crafting a plan for Downtown's future.

As you know, the mission of Updowntowners is to enhance the social, cultural and economic vitality of Downtown Lincoln through the production of special events. We see special events as an integral part of enhancing the Downtown experience for all members of our community, and contributing to the sense of Downtown as common ground for everyone.

We appreciate the efforts that the Master Plan consultants and the Action Team have made in trying to accommodate the need for event venues among the many competing demands for space in the Master Plan. We recognize that it can be difficult to reserve space for events that do not operate on a continual basis, as compared to other uses that might be seen as more permanent. At the same time, we continue to feel that event venues are an important part of the Master Plan.

We are particularly pleased with the proposed Civic Square concept for the site of the former Douglas 3 Theaters on the northeast corner of 13<sup>th</sup> and P Streets. We can foresee the use of this site for smaller scale or program-type events, such as the Holiday Lighting Ceremony and our proposed Weekly World Market of ethnic foods, merchandise and similar activities. Given our background in producing events Downtown, Updowntowners would be interested both in staging some events and activities on the Civic Square, and in exploring the possibility of event management for the Square itself.

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While the Civic Square concept holds many interesting possibilities for Downtown, we believe everyone recognizes that it cannot accommodate large-scale events such as our July Jamm or Celebrate Lincoln. The Square itself is too small, and closing down the surrounding streets does not appear feasible, given the uses contemplated for the area in the draft Master Plan.

As far as a full-sized event site goes, we are aware of the Festival Garden concept that has been mentioned near our current July Jamm site at 12<sup>th</sup> and N Streets, on the property now occupied by Firestone and Lincoln Federal, just north of St. Paul United Methodist Church. Again, we appreciate the efforts being made to provide adequate space for large events. However, we feel this location has constraints that make it impractical for events of the size that now exist, let alone any growth in these or similar events.

July Jamm and Celebrate Lincoln currently use the equivalent of one square city block at 12<sup>th</sup> and N, and we are feeling tight on this site as is. The Festival Garden provides only half of a city block. Closing surrounding streets to expand the site would adversely impact the Energy Square and TierOne garages, the bus loop on 11<sup>th</sup> Street, and bike routes proposed in the Master Plan for both 11<sup>th</sup> and N Streets. Further, a major portion of the site would be immediately adjacent to St. Paul's, raising noise and alcohol concerns as compared to the present arrangement, which provides some cushion for the church. While St. Paul's has been most accommodating, we cannot assume this may always be the case. On top of this is the unattractive prospect of displacing active Downtown businesses. At the very least, this site would not become available for some years. Given all these considerations, Updowntowners regrets that we do not see the Festival Garden concept as being viable for large events. We feel that we need to make our viewpoint clear on this aspect of the draft Plan, to avoid any confusion on the issue.

Updowntowners has engaged in considerable internal discussion about Downtown's need for an event site that can accommodate large events. Rather than choose a specific site, we feel it is more useful to provide specifications for a site and allow the consultants and City planners to incorporate such a site where it may best fit in the Master Plan. Based on our experience and discussions, we feel a viable event site needs the following:

- 1.) A contiguous area equal to at least one city block (roughly 90,000 square feet) in a useable configuration, with the ability to expand through street closures or other means that will not unduly disrupt surrounding uses.
- 2.) At least some green space or attractive vistas for the site with access to parking for vendors and larger vehicles.
- 3.) A configuration and topography that allows for use of a good-sized stage. Sightlines that allow the crowd to see are obviously important. Use of any existing slope that might improve viewing or have some amphitheatre effect would be desirable.
- 4.) Basic infrastructure tie-ins. Given the wide variety of possible events, with divergent logistical needs, future changes in technology, etc., the site should not be over-built from an infrastructure viewpoint, as this might limit its flexibility. However, basics such as a stage pad site, heavy-duty power stub-ins, potable water stub-ins, sanitary sewer

access points, possibly restrooms, and a site layout that would minimize perimeter fencing would all be desirable.

5.) Accessibility. If the event site is to benefit Downtown, it cannot be isolated from Downtown. Both in perception and reality, such a site needs to be accessible by foot and vehicle from Downtown, with appropriate use of Downtown parking resources for the patrons.

While there are many aspects to an event venue, we feel the items above give some parameters for selecting a site useful for large events.

We have heard suggestions that Pershing Center should relocate and, for example, that the main public library could revamp the current Pershing site, with events potential around it and on Centennial Mall. This might be an area to consider. The growing discussions about an arena and convention center area in the current rail yards west of Haymarket suggest there might be space for an events site in that locale. This is yet another possibility.

Updowntowners is not locked into any particular location. What we do believe is that any location designated for use as a large-scale events site has to meet most of the criteria listed above, or it will cause further challenges for successful event production and not truly meet the future needs of a vibrant Downtown Lincoln. Updowntowners, Inc, appreciates your consideration of our concerns. We stand ready to work with you to create an exciting vision for Downtown's continued growth and revitalization. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

UPDOWNTOWNERS, INC.

*Deb Johnson*

Deb Johnson  
Executive Director